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Potential sites for CSX project could be cut to 2 by July, Elkridge residents told

About 200 attend community meeting with legislators to express opposition to facility

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The list of four potential sites for a \$150 million CSX rail and container transfer facility will be cut to two by July, a pair of state lawmakers told a standing-room-only crowd of about 200 Elkridge residents fighting the project in their community, but a state transportation official said later that that is not certain.

"All the [elected] representatives here are totally supportive of your position and will do anything conceivable to stop this project," state Sen. **Edward J. Kasemeyer**, chairman of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, told the applauding crowd Thursday night.

He said state transportation officials told him days earlier that the list of potential sites will be cut in half. Del. James Malone said he got the same information from CSX officials, but neither knew whether the site at Hanover and Race roads in their district will be in or out, bolstering the residents' resolve to pressure officials to eliminate the site near them.

But Jack Cahalan, a spokesman for the Maryland Department of Transportation, said Friday that things are not as definite as the legislators said. "It is possible. It is certainly an option" to drop sites from the list, he said, and that might happen after several months of evaluation of all four sites, but it is not a given. "We have to be careful about creating any expectations," he said.

State and railroad officials want to be able to stack two cargo containers on train cars to boost shipping at the port, but to do that, they must move from the Seagirt Marine Terminal at the harbor's edge to a spot south of the antiquated Howard Street train tunnel, which is too low to allow double-stacking. The four potential sites identified as finalists include two in Howard County, the one in Jessup on the Arundel side of the tracks and a fourth farther south in Prince George's County.

The other Howard County site would be north of Montevideo Road, a few miles south in Jessup.

Kasemeyer and Malone, both Democrats who represent District 12 covering Elkridge and part of [Baltimore County](#), disagreed on another vital element in what has quickly boiled into a major community topic at the meeting of the Greater Elkridge Community Association in a volunteer fire station hall.

Kasemeyer said he believes, as many residents do, that CSX has decided to put the station, which will be used to double-stack cargo containers from Baltimore's port on rail cars headed south or west, in Elkridge.

"This is scary," Kasemeyer said, "because it's kind of a goofy, inappropriate location."

But he warned residents that the fight would be tough.

"It's like David vs. Goliath. I think we've got to be prepared to go to the mat," he said.

The Elkridge site is near state parkland and has 365 homes within a quarter-mile. The facility, which would operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, will use cranes to move bulky metal containers as trains idle. Hundreds of heavy trucks a day would also move through the site and use nearby roads.

The residents believe that CSX made its decision months ago and claim that the selection process was rigged. Cahalan denied that Friday. "There has been no pre-determination of any site," he said, though a CSX affiliate has already bought two of a dozen private parcels on the Elkridge location.

But Malone, who chairs a subcommittee on transportation in the House, said he thinks Elkridge will not be chosen.

"I don't think the site is Elkridge. I truly believe that," he said. "We will know the final two sites in July."

The Elkridge site is in a flood plain, and the railroad is negotiating to buy land at all four sites, he added.

"My instinct is it's going to be Jessup," he said, referring to a plot next to a state prison on the [Anne Arundel County](#) side of the Camden line tracks.

County Councilwoman Courtney Watson, a Democrat who represents the area, also attended, as did Del. Steven DeBoy and representatives of [County Executive Ken Ulman](#) and U.S. [Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin](#). Republican [Robert L. Flanagan](#), the former [Maryland](#) transportation secretary who lost a bid last year to unseat Watson, also attended.

Watson agreed with Kasemeyer, believing CSX and state transportation officials want the Elkridge site because of nearby available warehouses, but she suggested more than just opposition.

"We have to help them solve their problem. This is a good project for the state of Maryland," she said.

The officials urged residents to continue their efforts to push Elkridge off the list or to make another spot seem more attractive. CSX and the state are splitting the cost of the project, though federal money could also be involved. If state funding is needed, Kasemeyer and Malone said they could kill the deal.

A final decision isn't expected until a nine- to 12-month federal evaluation process is completed sometime in 2012.

[Howard Johnson](#), president of the Elkridge community association, urged residents to wear red protest shirts to a state-sponsored information session about the project at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Elkridge Landing Middle School. He also urged them to ask questions in writing to glean more information.

CSX and state transportation officials have said they were planning to study the four of what began as 12 potential sites, including the one in Elkridge, for the 70-acre facility, which residents fear would also force the Howard County school board to find another spot to build a new elementary school.

Robert Sullivan, a CSX spokesman, said the railroad has purchased two of the 12 parcels that would be needed for the facility if it were built in Elkridge, but he said the 1.4-acre acquisition does not mean the railroad has settle on the site.

He said the railroad was talking with landowners at the other three sites as well.

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